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**Region IV Public Health**  
Clark, Cowlitz, Skamania, Wahkiakum counties  
and Cowlitz Tribe

# Health Advisory

Please deliver a copy of the accompanying alert to each provider in your organization.

**Thank you**

**Questions regarding this alert may be directed to the office of:**

Alan Melnick, MD, MPH  
**Health Officer**

Jennifer Vines, MD, MPH  
**Deputy Health Officer**

Clark County Public Health  
Cowlitz County Health Department  
Skamania County Health Department  
Wahkiakum County Department of Health and Human Services  
(360) 397-8412

**Please Distribute**

Categories of Health Alert messages:

**Health Alert:** conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

**Health Advisory:** provides important information for specific incident for situation; may not require immediate action.

**Health Update:** provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; no immediate action necessary.



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## HEALTH ADVISORY September 3, 2010

TO: Physicians and other health care providers  
FROM: Alan Melnick, MD, MPH, CPH, Health Officer  
DATE: September 3, 2010  
RE: **Pertussis update**

Clark County Public Health continues to find relatively high levels of pertussis in Clark County. Since our previous pertussis advisory sent on August 20, additional cases have brought the summer total to 38 confirmed or probable cases, identified in a series of unrelated clusters. Although these numbers are not unusually high, with school starting and fall weather bringing more people together indoors, we are concerned about the potential for spread. Therefore, we are reminding providers to urge all their patients to be current on their pertussis vaccinations, as well as standard back-to-school immunizations and flu immunizations.

Classic pertussis is characterized by spasms of severe coughing (paroxysms) lasting from 6 to 10 weeks. Clinicians should suspect Pertussis when any cough is paroxysmal or lasts more than a week. Pertussis typically lacks fever and classically progresses through three stages:

1. Catarrhal (1–2 weeks): mild, upper respiratory tract symptoms gradually develop with an intermittent non-productive cough.
2. Paroxysmal (1–2 weeks or longer): spasms of cough end with a gasp, whoop, or vomiting (post-tussive emesis). Adolescents and adults may have less dramatic symptoms.
3. Convalescent (2–6 weeks or longer): gradual resolution of the paroxysmal coughing.

Pertussis can occur at any age, regardless of vaccination history. Apnea rather than cough may be the initial or most important symptom in infants less than 6 months of age. A clue to the diagnosis in **infants only** is an elevated white blood count (over 15,000/mm<sup>3</sup>) with a predominance of lymphocytes. Pertussis among older children, adults, and those previously immunized can be milder than classic whooping cough; the symptoms may be no more distinctive than other upper respiratory tract infections. Death and serious complications occur mainly in infants and can include apnea, malnutrition, pneumonia, pulmonary hypertension, seizures, and encephalopathy. Older individuals may suffer from sleep deprivation, sweating, syncope, rib fractures, hernia, and urinary incontinence. The differential diagnosis of pertussis includes other respiratory pathogens such as adenoviruses, *Bordetella parapertussis*, *Mycoplasma pneumoniae*, *Chlamydophila* (formerly *Chlamydia*) *pneumoniae*, and respiratory syncytial virus.

Treatment and post-exposure guidelines for pertussis are attached. Early treatment (within the first two weeks of paroxysmal cough) is much more effective in preventing secondary spread than treatment started later. Initiating treatment more than 3 weeks after onset of paroxysmal cough is unlikely to be beneficial and should be limited to situations in which there is on-going contact with high-risk individuals such as an infant under 1 year of age or a pregnant woman in the third trimester.

Please report all cases to:

- Clark County Public Health: (360) 397-8182
- Cowlitz County Health Department: (360) 414-5599
- Skamania County Community Health: (509) 427-3850
- Wahkiakum County Health and Human Services (360) 795-6207

For additional information, see <http://www.doh.wa.gov/notify/nc/pertussis.htm>. Thank you for your partnership.